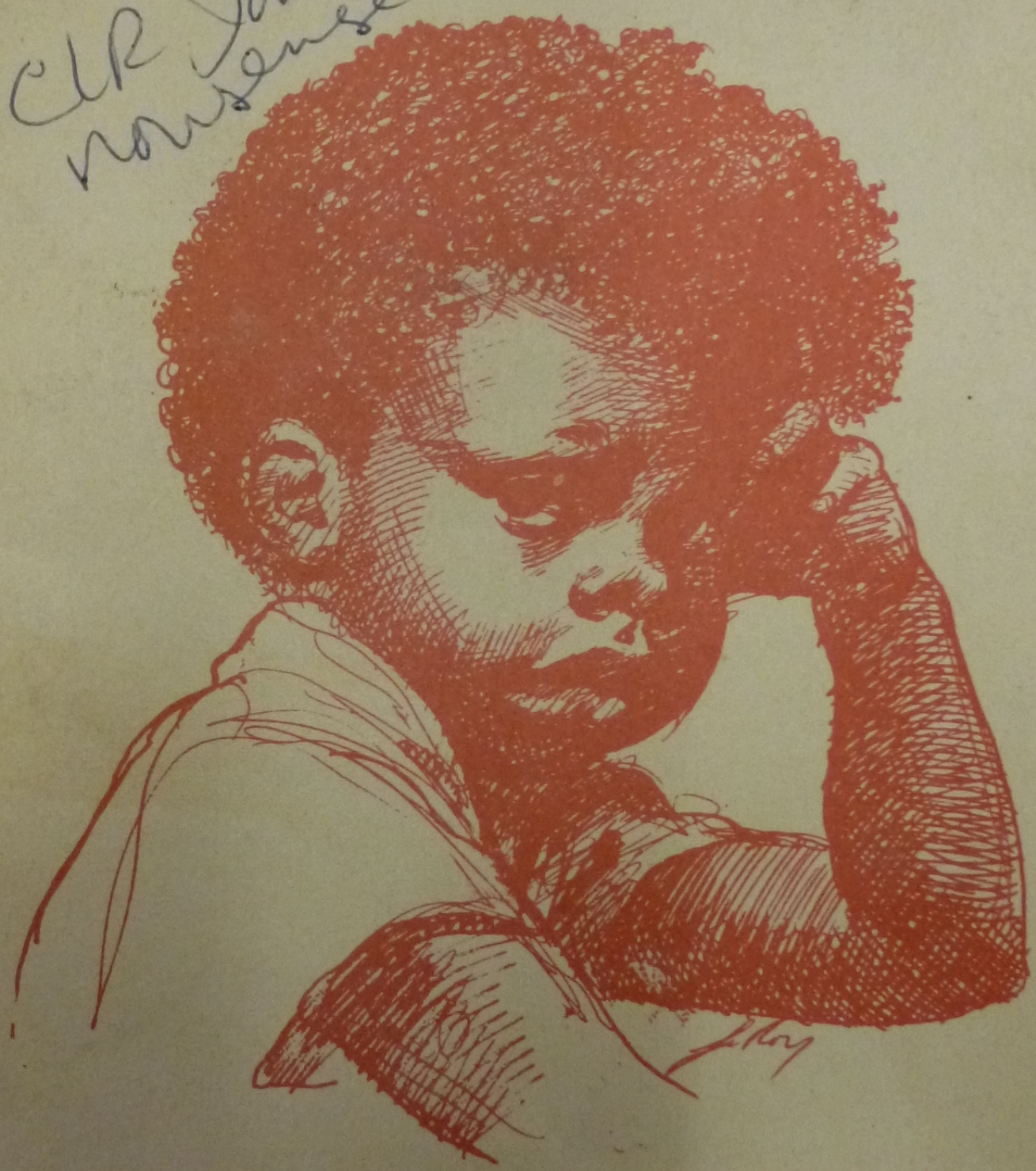
CARIBBEAN CORRESPONDENCE



Look, I'm exactly six months older today and there are many things I want to do.

this publication is free
to you, if you don't
have money, and donations
are needed from those
who have.

JUNE 1975

Page

Introducing the Publication I

Misrepresentation of Self-Management in the Caribbean 8

Self-Management and the Lip Occupation 29

This pamphlet was produced through the sharing of skills, energies and resources. The possibilities for further efforts of self-management rest with you. Share your resources of money, paper, ink, cartoons, articles, skills and energies towards similar goals.

INTRODUCING THE PUBLICATION

Those of us who are gathered together in the initiative to produce this publication are faced with much difficulty in elaborating our concepts, and in collecting and circulating the information we know of, useful to real change. Poor and oppressed folks everywhere are at a disadvantage in this regard, and we are trying to play a part in moving beyond this weakness.

We are for generalized self management. For the absolute power of the workers councils on the farms, in the factories, and in the communities were people work and live as the organizational groundation of their social relations. Where private property and money as a means of exchange do not exist. Where there are no universities, no parties, no prisons, no judiciary, no unions, no standing army, no police, and no state at all whatsoever.

Because nowhere on earth does this quality of life prevail in practice, even to the degree of providing for a continuing revolutionary transformation to attract others like us to its immediate defence, we have a theory which is without a general practice. This is our difficulty.

Yet revolutionary moments some have demonstrated this practice. And although these moments did not embrace the entire terrain of social life in any particular country, the Paris commune of 1871 in an urban situation, the workers' councils of 1905 in Russia at the point of production in factories, and the self-management of People living in rural areas of Spain in 1936, who organized their production and distribution without the use of money, and many other similar situations, showed by these particular organic experiences their possibilities at the general level.(1) These moments were not theoritical discoveries of socalled advanced objective conditions. They burst on the scene from the subjective will of proletariams. So when we reason of theory, we reason also of that which has happened - to learn the truth - to liberate our subjectivity from the wet blanket of isms and schisms that ideology is trying to place down on us.

We are not at all discouraged. Within our own immediate ranks and with those of us from whom we are separated by space, we are trying to develop the kind of practice that gives us more control over our daily life. We want to study in a self-directed way, to meet collectively our needs of survival, to make our practice in general strengthen our participation for a world

of self management.

We expect the publication to be coming forward on a regular basis. The thrust of our criticisms will be on many fronts, and as vigorous as possible against our own illusions as poor and oppressed folks, that leaders will one day lead us to liberation. With equal vigor we will defend, wherever it arises, our inherent self organization towards continuing revolutionary growth.

The academics and vanguard groupings who hoard and monopolize information useful to our struggle, using this privilege at the same time to claim an indispensible expertise, are by their deeds a fifth column of the bourgeois within our general advance and must be exposed. Wherever they make contact with the proletariat, they form some kind of bureaucratic organization under their control, through which they seek to establish their hegemony over the general activity. As far as our membership and participation is concerned, it is only as a "mass base" for them to ride upon to national popularity as a specialized representation, a representative influence, used among other things to slander and try to crush those from the same "mass base," who even as much as question their usurpation of power.

Throughout time, the truth of the revolutionary moments has been suppressed by these same types of forces in the history books they write, in the same way they murdered the proletarian forces in those same moments when their power was challenged. They cannot be trusted at any time at all whatsoever anywhere.

A modern liberal variation of these ideological forces is now being concocted at Cornell University under the name of self management, directed by Jaroslav Vanek. Unlike the Marxist-Leninists that claim "according to the necessary objective conditions," that there must be advanced technology and plenty of industries before the state can give the people socialism and democracy; Vanek's model claims that it can be applied to any kind of production process, and allows for the immediate participatory democracy of workers in managing functions. Whether the country where the industry is situated is highly industrialized or not, it makes no difference, they say. In relation to the dominant authority of the state over the totality of human social relationships, Vanek is nevertheless identical to the Marxist-Leninists. His model does not mind the market economy under the centralized planning of government ministries. It seeks to invervene only partially in life - that is, in

production for the purpose of efficiency - and in so doing there is no effect on the quality of social relations, either in the said production process or anywhere else. It gets bogged down in economics. Jaroslav, your criticism of the Russian-type command system in relation to your labor-managed system is therefore meaningless.

The practical indictment has come rather early against this brand of self management where it is applied - among other places in Peru, at the Castle Bruce farm in Dominica, and in Jamaica, where it is being introduced in the sugar industry. In each of these projects, workers are made into capitalistic bureaucrats over themselves as wage slaves. In relation to the rest of poor and oppressed folks in the surrounding villages, and in the same village where the work goes on, they are privileged. Their so-called cooperative efforts have produced an organized selfishness by them that was not there before, because the land which must be the social property of all, combines as their private property with their labor to bring the products thereof under their sole control. Nowhere outside of token paternalism, is there the opportunity to share the products and capacities of their organization with the rest of the people in the village, or to invite them on an equal basis to participate in their activities. Their struc-

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turalism alienates them, and the substance of what they are doing in no way attacks private property, which is the basis of commodity production and continuing capitalist power. That is why wherever it exists, it is not a revolutionary example that can spark the imagination of the proletariat of the respective area. There must be vigorous criticism of this new breed of academic professionals and the ideological disease they are spreading in the Caribbean.

We know there are places where people now have access to more material commodities than they did in the past. This is not the criteria of our comparisons between the past and the present. In fact, it is precisely through the expansion of commodity production that subtler forms of class divisions are perpetuated and alienation is becoming more chronic. The use of the past can only be to learn about the illusions and practical mistakes of proletarians, particularly in the revoluntionary moments that have been defeated, so as to avoid repeating them. Our comparisons of what is happening at present is with our dreams. Only with this imagination can passions be aroused to grasp the possibilities of today and turn them into the future.

In the final analysis, the critique of the existing world can only be in practice. When the

general assault of the proletarians directly establishes the groundation of generalized self management. When the great energy of employed workers that is being dissipated in strike after strike particularly in Trinidad and Jamaica, will move to occupy the factories and farms to continue production in a new way, in harmony with the generalized self management of our daily life.

The vibrant spirit of anti-authoritarianism in the rise of dread throughout the region, augurs well for change in the inevitable confrontations. In our spontaniety, a unity will have to be found in the subversive position of the 45% unemployed with those employed, that will put an end to the Babel tongue of the vanguardists, who continue to denounce those surviving outside of wage slavery as lumpen. The world at present needs a spark somewhere, and it is important to realize that the possibilities of defeat are definitely no greater than the possibilities of victory.

One Heart

FOOTNOTE (I)

.....Only the class can by its action penetrate the social reality and transform it in its totality. That's why, the consideration of the totality , the "critique" that acts from the point of view of the class, is the dialectical unity of theory and praxis. It's in a dialectical and indissociable unity, at the same time, foundation and consequence, reflection and motor of the historical dialectical process. The proletarial, subject of the thought of society, dislocates at once the dilemma between the fatalism of pure laws and the ethics of pure intentions.

Gyorgy LUKACS in History and Class-consciousness

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MISREPRESENTATION OF SELFMANAGEMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN

Self-management is what the revolution is all about. The struggle being waged by the masses of people to gain direct control over all areas of social life, the absence of which is responsible for their poverty, oppression and alienation; this struggle is the struggle for self-management. Relating directly to the place of work, self-management does not mean that management consults the workers on what it, management, intends to do. What it does mean is that the workers themselves should collectively manage their work in all its aspects and put an end to any management other than they themselves. However the concept of self-management, to be meaningful, could never relate to only the place of work or any other separate part of social existence. Because of the interdependence of all areas of our social life, and because humanity demands liberty in all areas of social life, then self-management to be meaningful and real must embrace life in its totality.

Within the Caribbean today, the concept of self-management is being terribly distorted and

prostituted, both by the ruling bureaucracies and the host of Marxist-Leninist bureaucracies which are seeking to replace them. One could sit back with a sort of naive satisfaction and say that it is a testament to the high level of revolutionary consciousness of the Caribbean masses that the tyrants and apprentice tyrants should be forced to include promises of self-management, as dishonest as they are, within their arsenal of false promises. The fact is, that while on the one hand it is the day-to-day struggles of the poor and oppressed in the Caribbean that forces them to talk about self-management, their talk of self-management is nevertheless a direct reaction to that struggle and is meant to spread confusion and ultimately defeat the oppressed masses in their struggle for true liberation. It therefore becomes of critical importance that every effort be made to unmask these wolves in sheep's clothing, and to maintain a clear vision of the struggle for self-management, for a society in which the masses of people exercise direct control over the means of production, the production process, the products of their labor, and every area of their social life.

Caribbean society is boiling and seems to be bursting at the seams. In territory after

territory, we see employed workers waging a struggle on two fronts, as they openly challenge so-called management prerogatives at the same time that they are waging a relentless struggle against their unions. With the endless number of strikes that seem to have become a permanent feature of Caribbean life, wild-cats are more the rule than the exception. Increasingly, workers are realizing that so-called industrial agreements, the deals worked out between union and management, not only place a limit on their decision making, but also place restrictions on their methods of struggle. Thus, today in the Caribbean, it would not be incorrect to say that union bureaucrats are usually the last people to hear about a strike.

The editorial of the Trinidad Sunday Express of December 15, 1974, should give us a feel for the present state of affairs. It said, "The utter disregard of the Industrial Relations Act (IRA) has resulted in strikes becoming an almost daily happening with workers prepared to withdraw their labor under the slightest pretext." It went on, "It is up to the unions to exercise control over their members if they are to justify their positions as bargaining representatives. It is not sufficient for the unions to take the line that the workers had been advised by them and that there is nothing more

they can do. If a union is unable to exercise such control, then its leadership ought to be changed....The act of striking, which is illegal anyway, for what is certainly a matter falling outside the industrial agreement, can only be regarded as irresponsible action, and it is hoped that those responsible for advising the workers will indicate to them the folly of their actions." It then turned to the workers saying, "It is time that the workers of the country realise that action like this, grasping at all sorts of extras, is reaching to the point of absurdity, and a government might well be forced to take such action that might cost them their precious freedom." And should any of us harbor any doubts about how seriously the union bureaucrats take their job of controlling the workers, let us look at what Basdeo Panday, President General of the All-Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factories Workers Union, told his workers after they had taken just such an action. In its issue of 12-14-74 the Trinidad Guardian reported, "The union leader explained to the workers that their actions were an embarrassment to the union and a hindrance in the current negotiations for a new three-year industrial agreement." This is the scene throughout the Caribbean and it is complemented by frequent seizure of lands by peasants in their ongoing struggle against land owners and the state.

MS #1529)

However, we have only been looking at those people lucky enough to be employed. The Caribbean youth, who make up the greater portion of the high percentage of unemployment in the region, have not been sitting idly by. From Jamaica to Antigua to Dominica to Trinidad to Guyana and in between those, it is the same thing. The ruling classes and the state machinery in the various territories have virtually declared war on young people. And in their day-to-day struggle against the state, young people, once attracted by the revolutionary rhetoric of the various bureaucratically centralized groups in the area, are more and more rejecting such groups because of bitter experiences and are by themselves trying to throw up more democratic organizational forms. They are moving away from the vanguard organizations, which stifle their initiative and seek to set up a "leadership" over them.

It is against this background that we have the middle class state bureaucrats on the one hand and the various Marxist-Leninist parties and movements on the other, all talking about workers control and self-management. And as if not to be outdone, the union bureaucrats too have begun to call for workers control and self-management. All three of these forces are as different from each other as the Father, the Son

and the Holy Ghost. What keeps them apart is their power struggle, which results from their common desire to be in control of the state machinery. What makes them one is their equally common desire to continue the oppression and exploitation of the masses of people, under the hierarchical organization of work for their commodity economy, with themselves as professional specialists in charge of the factories and state institutions.

Around the world, capitalism is in the midst of a crisis. From Sweden to America to Cuba to England to Yugoslavia, they are all talking about 'worker participation.' Worker alienation seems to be getting more acute, and whether it is the worker in Moscow who stays home and drinks vodka or the worker in Detroit who goes to work and sabotages the machinery, workers around the world are fighting back. As a result of this, production is not increasing the way the capitalists would like it to and in some cases even dropping. Their intellectual agents have told them that the workers' sense of alienation could be reduced by allowing them to (Participate!?!) in management and ownership.

We in the Caribbean are very much a part of the world capitalist system. Thus, let us sit back and listen to what the Hon. Michael

Manley has to say on the subject.

> May I now turn to a vital area: worker participation. One might be tempted to feel that one has discharged the obligation to change and restructure the society when an industry is nationalized. This is a trap into which many an unsuspecting socialist has fallen. Here, however, we are in danger of confusing institutional shadow for the substance of change in the experience of human beings. The nationalization of the industry does not in itself bring any change in the experience of the worker. The motivation for workers' exploitation may be reduced when we substitute the state for the private shareholder. But the worker may find that he is, as before, a blind cipher in a machine that is controlled and managed by powers that are remote and insensitive.
>
> Hence we are planning to use the method of nationalization, where it is appropriate, as more than a bridge to public accountability. We see it as an opportunity to develop full worker participation in all significant aspects of social and economic activity. **

**Address given at U.W.I. St. Augustine 12-14-74

I am afraid that the second paragraph of Manley's statement proves that he is totally unaware of the piercing profundity of the first. He has unwittingly put forward the fundamental criticism of the nationalization theory (the current fad) and the Marxist-Leninist theory of state socialism. Both theories in fact amount to the same thing. Not for a moment must we imagine that Manley, Burnham or any of the others have any intention of restructuring society. The big power greed of the metropolitan capitalists, from their position of dominant control in the network of international capitalism, along with the general chaos in trade and capital investment, add up to make the particular foreign investors insensitive in negotiations with the local state bureaucrats over what percentage of the booty they must get from exploiting the human and material resources in the Caribbean. At the same time the current assault from the prisons, from the factories, in the streets and through occupations of land, has taxed all the means and weapons of social control, particularly the army, the police and academic education. This is the crux of their government problems of power relations. The motivation behind their rush to nationalize is the need to earn more income for the state. This becomes necessary because of the increasing cost of operating an ever-growing bureaucracy on the one hand and, on

the other, their position as state bureaucrats is the basis of the wealth of a large section of the Caribbean middle class. Manley is perfectly correct when he says that nationalization is confusing institutional shadow for the substance of change in the experience of human beings.

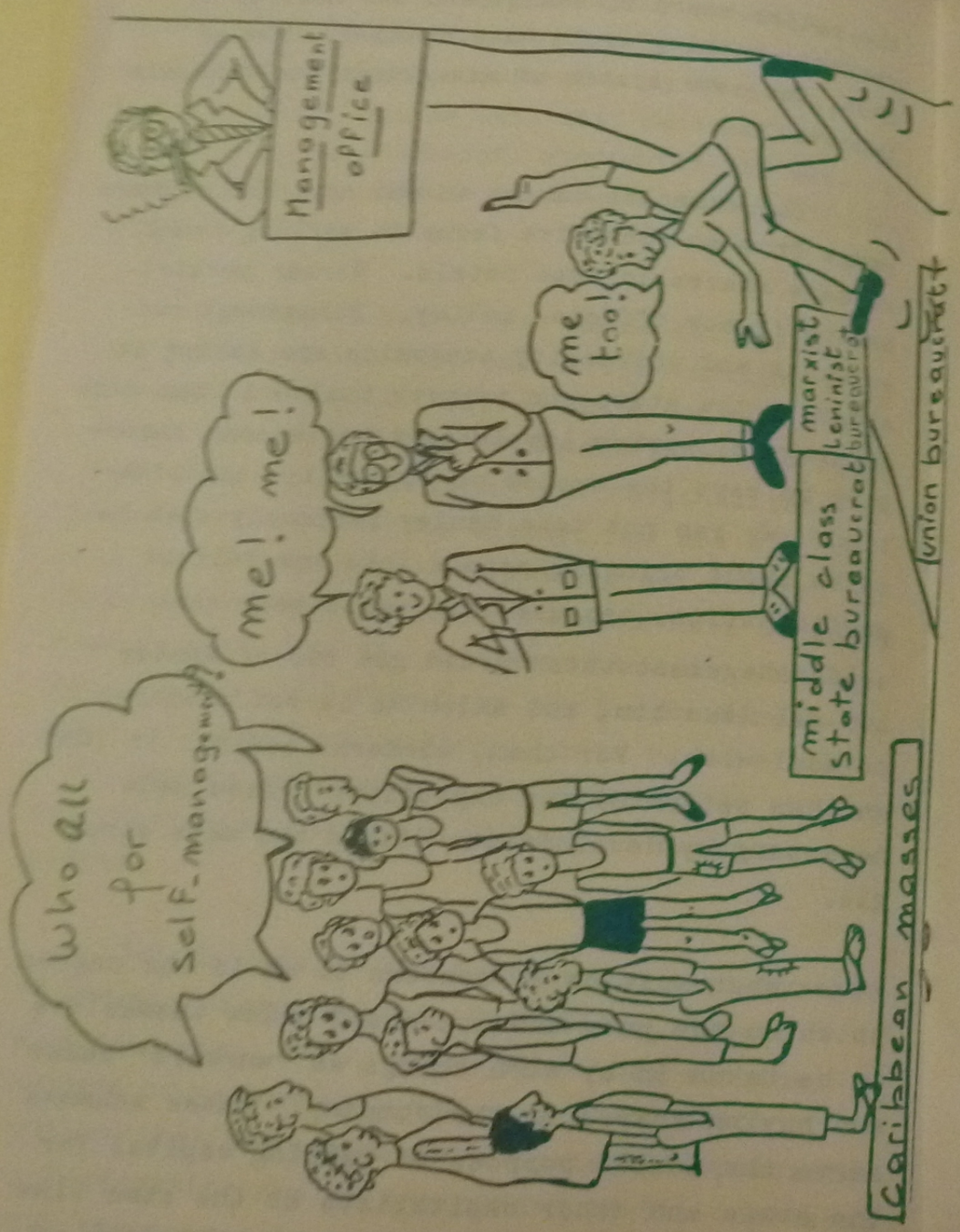
Caribbean workers have moved quickly to burst the illusion that the nationalization of an industry changes their position in relation to it. Note the strike of Guyana bauxite workers right after "their" company was nationalized. However, what we are up against now are all the talk and fraudulent schemes being put forward as workers control. Workers in Guyana have recently been appointed to the management boards of four public concerns. They have now become bureaucrats who were once workers, or to be more precise, worker bureaucrats. It seems as if an old chapter in Caribbean history is being replayed.

Let us look at the tyrants and semi-tyrants of today. George Walter, Eric Gairy, Robert Bradshaw, etc., etc., etc. Were they not the workers of yesterday? How many of us still believe that you could end a system of oppression by integrating one or any number of the oppressed into the oppressive bureaucracy? No! Even if

the entire board of management was made up of workers, nothing would have changed. Now as then, the same system of management would remain intact.

The examples can go on and on. The schemes range from co-operative farms to selling hotel workers shares in some hotels. Worker participation is now official policy. Management consultants and university academics are making it clear to the state and private business that some strategy of worker involvement has become necessary to save the system of capitalist exploitation. We can not take Manley seriously when he talks about bringing people into the fullest participation, because that would mean real self-management which would get rid of Manley and all like him, and which he is not prepared to deal with. For them, workers control is just another reform of the capitalist system made necessary by developments within the mass struggle.

What must be of concern to us is the degree to which the poor and oppressed allow themselves to be taken in by such things as "workers' banks" and buying shares in the company. These schemes serve the double purpose of raising capital for the state and other capitalists at the same time that they harbor in the workers the illusion of



involvement. Historically, one of the worst handicaps of the poor and oppressed has been their own illusions.

The free-market capitalists and the Third World champions of nationalization are not the only ones who find it necessary to integrate fraudulent schemes of "workers control" into their program. The Marxist-Leninists, known to be the defenders of hierarchy and authoritarianism, have begun to unfurl theories of self-management. We should now be able to understand why the confusion is total.

The theory of socialism expounded by Marx and Engels, which calls for the concentration of the means of production in the hands of the state, is in contradiction to the theory and practice of self-management. Marx himself brilliantly pointed out that unless production relations were changed, a change in property relations by itself (i.e. a move to state ownership of the means of production) would only mean a society of one big capitalist, but the same capitalist production relations would continue. It was Marx's naive belief in the eventual withering away of the state, plus his belief in the very need for the state, which led to his hierarchical and authoritarian view of "socialist society." The fact is that if we were to have

(1529)
R. Others-Caribbean, C. 1985

an immediate change in production relations (i.e. a move to direct control by workers over the production process and the products of their labor), this would bring the power of the workers into conflict with the power of "their" state. The fact is that genuine self-management and state power can never exist side by side. It could only mean a situation where the state bureaucracy "allows the workers to make certain decisions," but maintains the final power within its hands. But history has shown that the so-called peoples' states were never willing to do even that, because it puts wrong ideas into workers' heads and the workers may move to make their state-controlled self-management real. This is the controversy which is raging in Yugoslavia today, where self-management in commodity production operates under the centralist control of the communist party and the state.

How is it then that Marxist-Leninist groups like the New Beginning Movement, the Afro-Caribbean Liberation Movement, the New Jewel Movement, the Movement for a New Dominica, the Workers' Liberation League, the Revolutionary Marxist Collective, etc., etc.; how is it that they present themselves as people who are advocating self-management? To answer the question, we must first find out what they mean when they say self-management. Make no mistake about this;

they are Marxist-Leninist, they see themselves as the Vanguard, they intend to seize state power and set up a dictatorship. We can only take consolation in the fact that they promised to make their dictatorship a temporary one. But whatever became of self-management? Well we have not gotten to that yet.

Lenin saw "workers control" as a temporary measure which should be instituted to guard against the counter revolution, upon the defeat of which we should revert to good old socialist centralized planning. Also, he was of the opinion that this workers control thing was a good means through which workers could keep an eye on the bureaucrats whom he intended to appoint to man the scientific system of one-man management.'' But did not Michael Manley say something about nationalization being a bridge to public accountability? (And worker participation too?!) Anyway, the Marxist-Leninist concept of self-management was never any different from what we presently have in Sweden, Jamaica, Great Britain, Guyana, or Yugoslavia.

For these Caribbean revolutionaries then, self-management is nothing but a secondary part of their program and a fraud to boot. How can we reconcile the dictatorship of their vanguard and these popular assemblies which they love to make so much noise about. Where will the power

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By Others-Caribbean

rest - with their vanguard or with the assemblies? And what about the qualitative nature of these assemblies? Will they be just another set of (party controlled) rubber stamp parliaments, or genuine forms of organization for workers' power? The fact is that if you push these self-styled revolutionaries far enough, they will admit to you that their version of self-management only becomes meaningful after the transition period. The only trouble with that is that there is no end in sight to this transition period. The transition period, like the 'temporary' dictatorship, is permanent.

These so-called revolutionary organizations are carrying out a program of mass deception. On the one hand they run down the Marxist-Leninist ideology which can only lead to a state bureaucracy ruling over a society based upon capitalist production relations. On the other hand they babble about self-management and workers control. They are stuck in the same confusion that C.L.R. James has been stuck in for so long, pretending that state socialism and self-management are not irreconcilably opposed to each other. They run around calling themselves the new left, the new this and the new that, trying to hide the fact that theirs is the same old authoritarianism.

Can we solve the problem of the exploitation of man by man without simultaneously addressing ourselves to the problem of the authority of man over man?

The fundamental question of the revolution is not one of making more commodities available to people. However that seems to be the limit to which our Marxist-Leninist friends are willing to go. They are always quick to point out the statistics of how many children are in school after their seizure of power, how many more bottles of milk are produced, and the tripling in the production of shoes. But whenever one raises the question of hierarchical authority, there is always "the counterrevolution and the backwardness of the masses" to justify it. Added to that is the Marxist dogma which says that human society only becomes capable of freedom at a certain level (?) of commodity production. So we in the technologically underdeveloped areas of the world are faced with the added burden of having to wait until "our proletarian dictatorship" has taken us to that magic level of commodity production before we can put in our claim for freedom.(2)

The movement to self-management is one that sees the question of alienation as fundamental and therefore one that seeks to deal with the

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question of exploitation and authority at the same time. It is not that we don't see the question of more food, clothes and housing as being of the utmost importance. It is just that we have no intention of becoming only better-fed slaves. Still, this is not to say that exploitation does not continue under the Marxist-Leninist state. Under the socialist state (final stage of monopoly capitalism), surplus value goes to the state bureaucracy instead of private capitalists. It should be clear then that self-management is not an arrangement worked out by any state (Marxist-Leninist or not) for worker participation.

Seizure of control over the production process and the products of our labor are key elements in any attempt to end alienation. They will also be key elements in any attempt to establish self-management. We do not intend to concern ourselves with the legalities of who owns the means of production; whether it is the people, the state, or private capitalists. What concerns us is that we establish effective control over them. Let that determine the property relations.

All those who preach the virtues of hierarchical authority will accuse us of being opposed to organization. Ironically, in our

struggle to establish a society of self-management, where decisions are made by those whom they affect, it is precisely our organization (or lack of it) which will determine our success (or failure). They confuse bureaucracy and its hierarchical authority for organization. It becomes more absurd than ironic when one realizes that direct democracy, especially in today's world, requires an amount and quality of organization that is as yet to appear in any society. On the other hand, their organizational form, with the vast masses being directed by the few, is an absolute minimum of organization, and anything less would be no organization at all.

Far from being a program for worker participation within capitalist (or state capitalist) society, the struggle for self-management is a revolutionary project for the total transformation of society. The number of instances in which workers have thrown out management and proceeded to reorganize production on their own are acts that go way beyond the most liberal programs of the authoritarians. Yet such acts are just the beginning. The occupation of a particular place of work by its workers, together with a continuation of production under their collective management, can not continue in isolation for too long before it is recuperated in one form or another. It therefore necessitates a continuing

revolutionary process in which other work places and communities come to the defence of this occupation by initiating their own occupation. It is only a generalized movement of self-management, a final appropriation of the appropriators, that can get the poor and oppressed out of the vicious circle of strikes and strikes and more strikes. It is only at the point of production that the poor and oppressed masses can seize power.

Workers at particular workplaces must collectively manage the production process through their workers' councils, factory committees or what have you. And since individual workplaces could never decide what to produce in isolation from each other, plus the necessity for community input in such decisions, there will have to be widespread coordination of activities between the workers' councils and community councils of the various areas of production and other social activities. These councils are the organizational forms which will allow people to seize direct control of the production process, the means of production, and all areas of their social life. The process of co-ordination, carried out by mandated delegates who are subject to immediate recall, will be demystified from the state of mystification in which it exists under the system of capitalist production, to the simple administration of things.

The defence of the new form of social organization will have to be taken up by the armed masses themselves, coordinating the defence of the revolution in the same manner in which they coordinate production. Any attempt to leave the question of defence in the hands of specialist military leaders and their hierarchical form of military organization, can only result in the defeat of the revolution. There can be no power in the new society but the power of the workers' councils.

To repeat, it is only at the point of production that the poor and oppressed masses can seize power. The masses could never seize state power, because the state is a hierarchical form of social organization and could only be seized in the name of the masses by somebody else. Whereas a state machinery is needed by the minority oppressors to carry out the oppression of the mass population, the masses do not need a state machinery to suppress the minority oppressors. The armed population coordinating the defence of the revolution is not only enough and most efficient. It is also the only form of military organization that will not end up defeating the purpose of the revolution.

The history of past struggles has already proven the utter uselessness and the parasitic

Bl.Others-Caribbean, C. 1960s, 1975, 1985

nature of the bureaucrats of whatever ideological brand. Their sermons of how society would be in chaos without their mediation are now bad jokes.

They mistake the clear demands made by the masses for control over their lives, as requests to self-manage their own oppression. However, the final critique of them will be the act of removing them.

by Montgomery Stone

FOOTNOTES

(I) Forgetting Lenin: TELOS # I8

Lenin mentions the needs of "highly advanced technology." Technology is presented as an impersonal and impervious force in the same way as *matter* and finally history, understood as the history of matter, is presented within a dogmatic Marxism. Thus, all power to the technicians who know the secrets of technology, and know how to command it while obeying it, and who therefore command others without having to obey them. The politician himself is nothing but the engineer of revolution and of popular happiness.

The organizational technique of Leninism is only effective in the context of an alienated revolution. And the hierarchical setting, which Gorz points out in the capitalist enterprise, is immediately found functioning politically and not technically in the Party with its structure, its top directors, its assistant directors, the secretaries, the union bosses, and the official ideologues. In a word, the "professional revolutionaries" whose profession is precisely to remove the revolution from the proletariat, to transform politics into something external and transcendent, requiring their science and their skill.

(2) Administration Theory: TELOS # I2

Consumer Human is satisfied by an ever increasing volume of commodities; his labor is nothing more than a *means* in his life – his means of acquiring (by its sale) commodities, of appropriating property, of consuming. Work is seen as an activity which has no intrinsic value, hence its substance is unimportant, its form important only in relation to other goals. It is good to shorten it, to routinize it, to mechanize it; to increase its return – that's all that matters. For Creator Human his work activity *is* his fulfillment, hence it cannot be ordered in such a way as to preclude meaning, enrichment, and pleasure

SELFMANAGEMENT AND THE LIP OCCUPATION

"This is the time not for ideas but for action, for deeds. Above all, now is the time for the organization of the forces of the proletariat. But this organization must be the task of the proletariat itself."

Bakunin. *Letter to the Comrades of the Jura Federation.* 1873

✽

Since the middle of June, the 1300 workers of the Lip watch concern in Besançon, France, have been in occupation of their factory, where they have continued production on their own. Already this *active* occupation constitutes a moment of historical activity that no one can ignore. The strength of the Lip movement has been such that even its enemies have been obliged to feign support for it merely in order to retain their prestige. In taking their collective fate into their own hands, the men and women of Lip have begun a *critique-in-acts* of present social conditions. By seizing a factory, and thereby placing the immediate means of production and distribution at the service of their project, they have reversed the current state of social affairs and *they know it.* In organizing their activity by *themselves*, the Lip workers have affirmed their autonomy against the combined machinery of capitalism, the French Left, and the national trade unions. And in directly confronting the most oppressive reality of their lives—work—they have called the whole of capitalist society into question.

The implications of this movement are numerous—so numerous, in fact, that many of them have not been recognized by the participants on either side of the Lip controversy. It is these hidden tendencies which must be exposed to the critical light of day. In order for the movement to advance, both at Lip and elsewhere, a consciousness is required of *what has already been accomplished* and what this means for the *future.* Everyone is quite aware that the present situation at Lip is provisional. Either the occupation will be extended with the revolutionary participation of others, or it will be defeated in isolation in one way or another.

Through appropriating the product of their labor—the watches which they make—the workers of Lip have appropriated time *for themselves.* In precisely the sense intended by Marx, they have "expropriated the expropriators." They have taken an economic sector away from those who appropriate the work and the time—in fact, the life itself—of the proletariat. As such, the Lip workers have given a new meaning to their lives, both in quantity and quality.

B&Others-Caribbean, C. 1960s, 1975, 1985

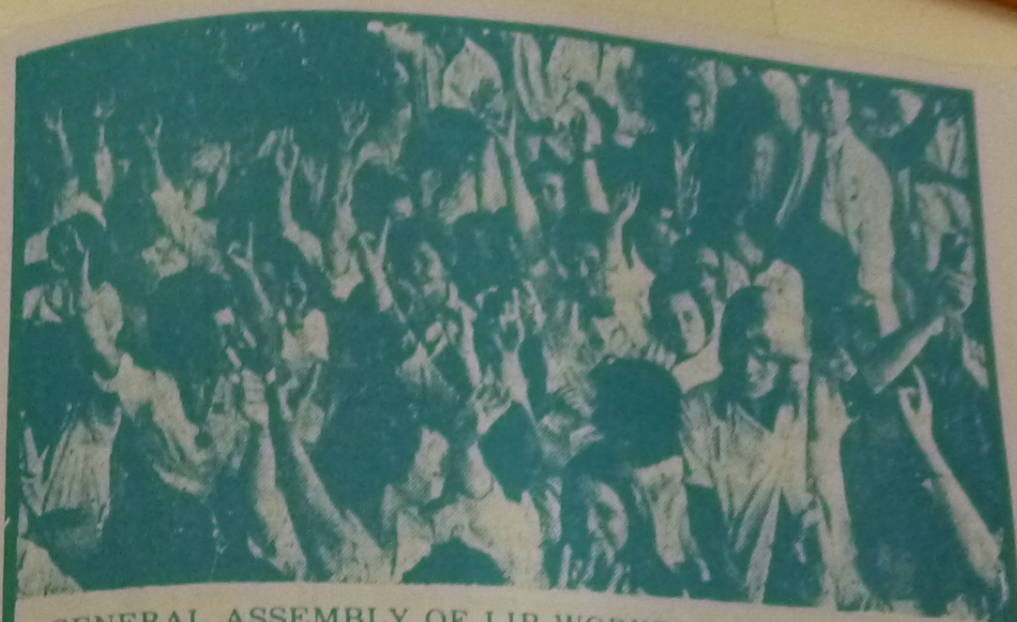
By reducing the price of Lip watches by 40 percent and initiating a wildcat form of distribution, the occupiers have already made a practical critique of political economy: they have adjusted the value of the objects they make in order to conform with their immediate needs. In doing so, they have revealed the truth of bourgeois value—their action exposes the exchange and surplus values inherent in commodity production as *superfluities*. The devaluation is simultaneously a devaluation of capitalist power. On a local but no less important level, the workers of Lip have reduced economic processes to "a simple administration of things."

In their own actions, in the free association of individuals in a common project, the Lip workers have discovered both the theory and the practice of their occupation. They have given the world a lesson in the power of radical spontaneity. They have had no need either of a party or of any other so-called "vanguard." Through their self-organization, they have begun to undermine the social organization of the old world. Their power contains within it the negation of bourgeois society, of hierarchy, and of exploitation. Even the Stalinist pimp, Georges Séguy (head of the CGT), recognizes this; he recently declared emphatically that he "would not buy Lip watches."

The movement at Lip began as a response to the threat of a general lay-off; in the by-now familiar words of British capitalism, the Lip workers had become "redundant." But the workers' organization of production at Lip has implicitly superseded the immediate question of economic survival. The Lip occupation has concretely posed the larger question of *social power*. In asking this question in a *practical* manner, the workers of Lip have already begun to answer it. They have transformed part of the terrain of capitalism into the terrain of the proletariat. *L'Express* reported that "work has taken on the air of a festival" at Lip.

The widespread enthusiasm generated by the events at Besançon in France, Europe, and the entire world, is itself an indication of the essential radical nature of the occupation. Everywhere, the proletariat recognizes itself in this exemplary action. Everywhere, those without power see in Lip beginnings of real change– the new power of Lip is *their* power as well. But this recognition is not enough in itself; the power of the Lip workers can only be confirmed through the creation of similar such powers. The only real support that can be given this movement is its *extension* to all sectors of society. The spontaneous generation of occupations in May '68 has shown how rapidly such actions can occur and how quickly they can place capitalism in serious danger of a fatal collapse.

At the same time, May '68 demonstrated capitalism's ability to defuse and recuperate even the most radical social crisis. Today, these same forces of recuperation threaten the Lip occupation. Already, a united front of the old world is preparing Lip's defeat. Using time-honored methods of social counter-insurgency, Capital is trying to buy off the movement and is doing so with the less-than-clandestine intervention of the trade unions and the parties of the "Left." To understand how such apparent enemies can come to a gentleman's agreement, one need only remember the Grenelle accords (concluded between the Stalinists and De Gaulle) after May '68 and the subsequent "victorious return to work," as the French CP rather candidly described *its* victory over the revolutionary movement.



GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF LIP WORKERS, JUNE 10 1973:
A UNANIMOUS VOTE TO BEGIN PRODUCTION ON THEIR OWN

"As soon as it has risen up, a class in which the revolutionary interests of society are concentrated finds the content and the material for its revolutionary activity directly in its own situation: foes to be laid low, measures dictated by the needs of the struggle to be taken; the consequences of its own needs drive it on. It makes a practical assessment of its own task. The French proletariat (like the proletariat in all countries) is capable of accomplishing its own revolution."

Karl Marx. *The Class-Struggles in France: 1973*

Capital will certainly attempt to recapture the Lip factory either by force or by deception. The French government may decide to return Lip to its previous owners or it may devise an acceptable form of "workers' control" in which the workers would be compelled to "choose" their own boss with the added consent of the unions. Capitalism would thereby "legitimize" a deformed "occupation," and Lip could then be easily reintegrated into its system. Or even further, it may try to close the factory and lay-off a number of the employees. Whatever "solution" is proposed by capitalism, the end result would be the same: the perpetuation of class-society.

Capitalism and its partners, the unions, always attempt to rearrange the particular details of alienation. But at Lip it is the *abolition* of alienation which is now on the agenda. The Lip workers have succeeded in thwarting the bosses' power for the moment and, as a consequence, hierarchy must assume a different guise and use other means to reinstate itself. These various forms of subterfuge must be guarded against; having kicked their bosses out the front door, the workers of Lip cannot let them slip back through the window in the bureaucratic form of the unions. All leaders are cops. Having lived without their former employers, the Lip workers know

perfectly well how to live without *all* bosses. The occupiers of Lip have shown (and they always knew it!) that they are capable of organizing their lives themselves. The sign placed over the factory entrance says it all: "It's possible: we produce and we distribute."

The workers of Lip have so far displayed a radical sense of tactics and strategy in their struggle against their ex-bosses and the local and national authorities. When they occupied their factory on June 10 they took management officials as hostages; these were only released after 200 police stormed the plant. Nevertheless, the Lip workers maintained their occupation and took new hostages in the form of 65,000 watches (worth $2.5 million) which were in the company's existing stockpile of finished products. These watches were then hidden within Besançon as a guarantee against future repression. Not surprisingly, the French association of manufacturers (CNPF) has expressed its alarm over these actions. In decrying the "theft" of Lip watches (to say nothing of the Lip factory), the bosses have unwittingly revealed the *social* theft which is the basis of all property. The Lip workers have only recovered what had been stolen from them every day through the very dynamics of capitalist production.

CURRENCY ISSUED BY THE PARIS COMMUNE, 1871

"The proletarians of Paris, amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has struck for them to save the situation by taking into their own hands the direction of public affairs . . . they have understood that it is their imperious duty and their absolute right to render themselves masters of their own destinies, by seizing upon the governmental power."

—Manifesto of the Central Committee of the National Guard (Paris). March 18, 1871.

The general assembly of the Lip workers already forms a potential basis for the establishment of a councilist power—it is a functioning example of direct democracy. But this radical power must recognize itself as such. The success of the occupation is by no means assured. To the extent that the Lip workers allow themselves to be represented-by the CFDT, for example-they have opened the door to the destruction of their autonomy. The unions already have reasserted their power in the committees (production, distribution, support) created by the occupation. The French press now speaks approvingly of a "ménage à trois"—CGT, CFDT, and the Lip Action Committee—at Besançon. This living arrangement is quite acceptable to capitalism and as long as it continues it is a sign, not of "workers' unity," but of the power of bureaucratic tendencies over the occupation movement.

The influence of the local trade unions is the most serious obstacle to any consciously radical movement at Lip. Throughout the occupation, the unions have been caught up in the flow of events. They have participated only to the extent that they have gone beyond the traditional role of trade unionism; as a result, they have been abandoned by the national trade union leadership. The mini-bureaucrats thus realize that their position is tenuous; if the occupation movement continues, they will be deprived of their role as *mediators*. Already, the resumption of production at Lip lies outside the province of *syndicalisme*. The Lip workers are not on strike, they are managing the means of production *for themselves*. But they must also take control of the occupation movement *for themselves*. The achievements of the Lip occupation can be reversed in a day unless the local union leadership is seen as its *enemy*.

If the incipient bureaucracy at Lip remains unchallenged, the results will be predictable. Each time that the French proletariat has attempted to establish its own authority—1936, 1945, 1968—the unions and parties have intervened, always to the profit of hierarchical social organization. However "democratic" and in favor of "self-management" they pretend to be, the unions are the necessary accomplices of capitalism. For the CFDT to speak of "self-management" is as ironical as when the Stalinists speak of "socialism." Quite naturally, the unions seek an "immediate solution" to the Lip situation; they fear the spread of the occupation movement.

All parties, whether in power or not, exhibit the same features. Their methods and their goals are similar—to gain power "on behalf" of someone else. The political charade found its most recent expression in the boisterous clamor made by the press, the Left parties, and militant sects, following the suppression of the Ligue Communiste. The actions of the trotskyists and the French government's response were both uniquely *spectacular*. In the era of international detente, the impotent nationalist ravings of the fascists have no more importance in relation to contemporary social struggles than the counter-histrionics of the ridiculous militant sects. While the racist assholes of the Ordre Nouveau rant about "immigrant" workers, the little militants of the Left reveal their own impotence: they can find no enemy other than the big bad fascist wolf. In suppressing the Ligue Communiste and the Ordre Nouveau, Power gives these non-entities an exaggerated importance—an importance which serves to conceal the real movement of opposition to spectacular society. The French Minister of the

Interior, Marcellin, can free the little bolshevik bosses immediately—Krivine and Rousset are of no danger to *him*. The trotskyists are no more revolutionary than those who support them today; their friend Mitterand and the French CP head up the list of their current "comrades."

The circus surrounding the suppression of the Ligue Communiste has nothing to do with the revolutionary movement. What is presently unfolding at Lip goes far beyond such political spectacles. In their practice, the workers of Lip have openly announced the existence of the subversive forces at work in present society, forces which at the same time will build a different society. This movement, already present at Lip, must become fully conscious of itself and its tasks in order to communicate its actions and ideas to the world.

At present, a stalemate exists at Lip. On July 13th, a French judicial tribunal declared the formal "liquidation" of the Lip establishment, but this action has no significance even in terms of bourgeois jurisprudence. In any case, the workers of Besançon have already liquidated Lip as a capitalist institution and in the last analysis it is they who will make the final decision about their factory. They have shown their determination to continue the struggle; on July 14th (Bastille Day, appropriately), they physically prevented the entry of a management representative at the facility.

The Lip workers have discovered their own radicalism by taking the initiative; their active occupation raises the issue of generalized self-management as a practical and immediate possibility. But this is not enough; the possible must become real. The questions raised by Lip must find their definitive solution in the practice of all those who want to change the world. The Lip workers will have lost this battle as soon as they surrender the initiative to capitalism or its unions. Many have become demoralized as a result of the existing impasse. It is clear that a return to the situation prior to the occupation would be a defeat. Victory lies only in the abolition of wage-labor and its bosses, in all society as at Lip. There is no possible basis of agreement between Power and those whom Power abuses.

In establishing a base for revolutionary action, the proletarians of Lip, of France, of the world, face the problems confronted by all the authentic revolutions of this century, namely the establishment and defense of a power without mediators. History offers many examples (suppressed by bourgeois analysts, Leninists, and ideologues of all kinds): Kronstadt, Ukraine, the Red Army of the Ruhr, the Spanish and Hungarian Revolutions. All these radical moments witnessed the appearance of workers' councils, democratic organs of self-management which organized the revolutionary transformation of existing social relations.

Despite their inadequacies, the proletarian revolutions of the past form a point of departure for the new revolutionary movement. In each instance, the revolutionary power established was not the dictatorship of a party *over* the proletariat but was a direct organizational expression of the workers themselves—the co-ordination of various tasks was accomplished through the election of revocable delegates answerable to a general assembly. Where such a direct democracy was able to develop, as in Spain-1936 where councils organized production, distribution, and defense over a large area, it proved to be the clearest example of what the revolutionary "organization of the forces of the proletariat" means.

meanwhile...

Isaac Shorter and Larry Carter (top) kept plant shut for 13 hours

Detroit

Two disgruntled workers, armed with heavy tools and shielded by sympathizers, barricaded themselves in a power control cage yesterday and shut down a Chrysler assembly line for two shifts.

More than 4500 workers were idled and the Jefferson assembly line, which produces about 60 Chryslers and Imperials an hour, could not move.

A Chrysler spokesman said Isaac Shorter, 26, and Larry Carter, 23, entered the cage on the plant's first floor about 6 a.m.

They locked themselves in the heavy wire-mesh cage and turned off the power that runs the body shop conveyor, the critical first part of assembly line operations. This cut off the supply of parts farther down the line.

After 11 hours of negotiations, Chrysler bowed to demands of Shorter and Carter and fired a superintendent. It also agreed not to take disciplinary action against the two.

Shorter and Carter gave up their occupation about 7:30 p.m., 13 hours after it began, and left the plant peacefully.

Protected by sympathizers who surrounded the cage to prevent plant security guards from physically removing them, Shorter and Carter demanded that the superintendent, Thomas Woolsey, 32, a six-year Chrysler veteran, be fired for being abusive and abrasive.

Chrysler said Woolsey was discharged after the charges had been "investigated thoroughly."

United Press

Wed., July 25, 1973

Price : $1.50

Spain and other radical explosions indicated only the *beginnings* of a councilist power, however. The achievements of the past are today only an absolute *minimum* for any revolutionary movement. The technical resources of contemporary society will enable the modern proletariat to accomplish in a few days what the Spanish revolutionaries were never able to complete—the total self-management of the means of production. Beyond such a task lies an immense game with space, time, and people: the complete reconstruction of the world according to human *desires*.

In spite of the radical accomplishments of the Lip occupation, one important step remains to be taken before the situation at Besançon becomes openly revolutionary. The self-defense realized by the Lip workers is a necesary precondition, but is itself not sufficient to establish real self-management. The workers of Lip cannot simply lay hold of the existing social machinery, and wield it for their own purposes. They must create new forms of social organization. At this time, the movement can only go forwards or recede. The actions of Lip must be echoed in other sectors of society. The movement that began at Besançon will succeed only through the creation of a widespread revolutionary situation—a social movement of which May '68 and the "Hot Autumn" in Italy in 1969 were only a taste.

Lip cannot be a tourist attraction for passive spectators. The open invitation made by the occupiers to other workers to come and see what is taking place at Besançon is certainly one of the most radical gestures of their movement—the Lip workers have sought to make their struggle known to everyone. But the example of Lip must be extended and improved. It is only a beginning.

The present occupation gives a new and subversive content to the French advertising slogan: "Lip gives the exact time." Now, it is the workers who give the true time, the hour when everything is possible, including social revolution. Already, the clothing workers of the Robin factory in Brittany have initiated a similar active occupation.

The kind of occupation taking place at Lip is precisely what was lacking in May '68. At that time, if one occupied factory had resumed production on a radical basis, the effect would have been that of a social detonator. By the same token, however, the occupiers of Lip require a large scale movement like that of May '68 in order to extend what they have begun. Today, the first signs of a general revolt are visible everywhere in France, in the high schools and in the many strikes like that of the Renault workers. Lip is not alone. Social conditions are the same everywhere and capitalism everywhere engenders the forces which will one day destroy it.

In attempting to show the implications of the Lip strike, we have only shown what was *already there*. The construction of the future awaits all those who wish to pursue their dissatisfaction with present society to its logical conclusion—a revolution of everyday life. In this text, we have not spoken *for* anyone except ourselves and others must now do the same for themselves. This text can in no way take the place of radical activity and it has not been written in order to be passively consumed—it must be submitted to practical and theoretical criticism. We have recognized our own desires in the actions of Lip; what others see in us will form the basis of a common project.

We carry a new world in our hearts, a world which is growing at this very moment.

The Friends of the Jura Federation.
August, 1973.

(A French version of this text was distributed recently at Besançon and throughout France.)

*

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PRESSURE AND WINDS

R. Athens-Caribbean, C. 1960's, 1975, 285

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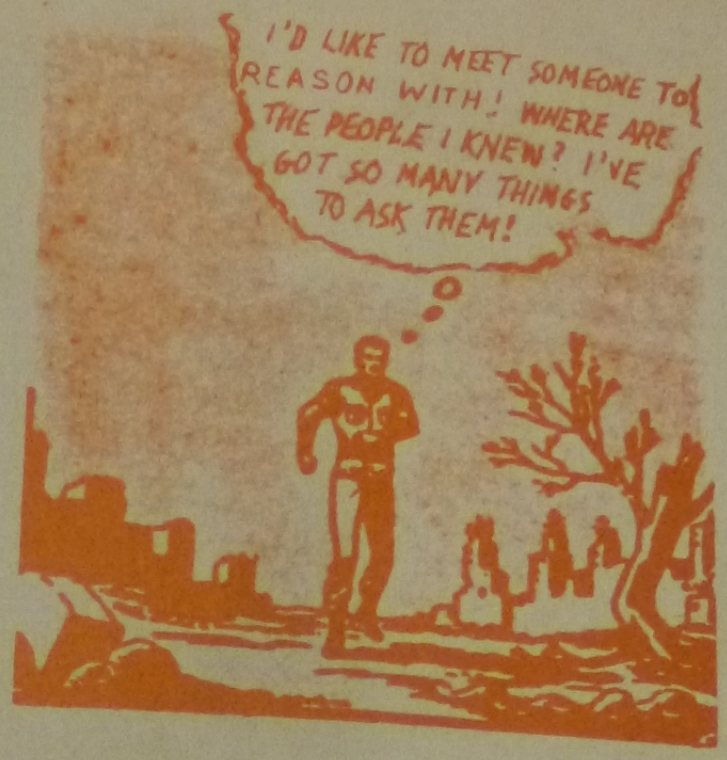

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